THE HANGING

by

Raymond E. Lee

My great-grandfather Peter Lee was only seven years old when, in 1827, his Father, Isaac Lee, sold his last six slaves in Jackson County, Tennessee, and moved with his family to the wilds of Southern Illinois. The family settled on land within three miles of where the log cabin village of Tamaroa was soon to be.

Even though many slaves were held in "Free Illinois", great-great grandfather was determined that he would own no slaves when he moved to Illinois. True, Isaac Lee, and later his son, Peter Lee, both kept household servants and field hands in Illinois. This fact has been verified in old census records which listed the Lee "family servants". But these people were not blacks. They were poor whites, generally both young men and women badly in need of a home, food, and shelter. For this they gladly exchanged their services. It is doubtful if much money was involved salary wise, for money was an extremely scarce item in those days in southern Ilinois.

The fact that our family came originally from Old Virginia, the Tidewater country, precluded a strong and felicitous feeling for Southern ideas, customs, and traditions. So it is no wonder that after Lincoln was elected the entire family was not long in taking sides with the South where so many of the "old family" still lived. It was only a short time until Peter Lee and his oldest son, Richard, quietly but vigorously encouraged by the elder Isaac Lee, would be giving all the support they could to the Southern cause as very active members of the "Knights of the Golden Circle". Taking such a stand naturally incurred the enmity of the local vicious and degraded "Union League" scoundrels who were to precipitate some quite evil and unhappy Civil War episodes in the name of Abe Lincoln.

Actually, the Lee family talked very little about the Civil War after it was over. When, as a very small boy, I used to quiz my own grandfather, John Drake Lee, he would turn me aside with the remark that one should "let bygones be bygones." The family as a whole deliberately avoided making comments to the youngsters about their war time participations. Great Aunt Sarah, Peter Lee's daughter, was 15 years old when the war broke out. She knew the part the family played very well. She always seemed to take quite a fancy to me and was relatively tolerant of my prying boyhood curiosity. I will always believe that during the time from her 85th birthday to her 99th year she may well have told me things about those awful war years which she never even confided to either of her two husbands.

My Great Aunt Sarah Lee Farmer Parker lived a charmed life, lacking only a few days of reaching her hundredth year. She "married money", especially in her first matrimonial venture, and her generous cash gifts to many members of her clan almost pauperized the entire lot. Her favorite and regular daily diet consisted largely of fat salt pork and corn pone, corn meal mush, or related variations. She would occasionally eat potatoes, but she would not eat fruits, and she refused to touch beef of any sort or kind. Both beef and fruits, she claimed, were not healthful foods. Her favorite sweetnerswere honey and sorghum molasses. (And she lived over 99 years!)

To her dying day Aunt Sarah wore long floor length dresses and boasted that no male except her two dear dead husbands had ever seen above her ankles. Quite alert, attractive, and comely, even in her late 90's, I often wondered if dear Aunt Sarah wasn't exaggerating her prudery a bit. Her eyes would certainly twinkle devilishly as she spoke of her overly virtuous life.

As the years continued their mellowing process, Aunt Sarah turned poetess,and she filled her scrap book with many of her poetic efforts, all indicitative of her life and moral outlook. The following poem was written when she reached her 90th birthday. It was read by her at the big family dinner honoring her as the "reigning queen" of the entire Lee clan.

Early facts unearthed by the Perry County Historical Society make mention of two events, namely, (1) that Peter Lee was one of the earliest school teachers in the big one room hewed-log village school, and (2) that a Negro was once hanged from the limb of a large elm tree that graced the southeast corner of the school yard.

Aunt Sarah once talked to me about this gruesome hanging, and I jotted down noted as she told it. It is an event to cause one to shudder even today. Perhaps it deserves to be told if for no other reason than to show the sometimes utter depravity of man . . . in this case some of the so-called "better citizens" of the village whose names were soon known for their dastardly deed and who were allowed to go scot-free.

Except for the Hayne's colored servant, Sam, and for a negro couple who lived on the B. G. Roots farm, no negroes were ever permitted to live in or near the village of Tamaroa. The prominence of the Haynes and Roots families served as protection for these negroes. The B. G. Roots negro couple were useful in assisting in the "underground railroad system" for runaway slaves to which Roots gave tangible and practical support in pre-Civil War days. Both of the negroes of B. G. Roots are buried on the Roots farm.

One negro family had the temerity in the early 1900's to move into a small house within a mile of the village of Tamaroa. The "good citizens" of the little community set fire to their house the first night the negroes moved in. They fled in terror down the railroad tracks amidst volley after volley of rocks and abusive vulgar cursings vented upon them by the "brave rock throwers from "rocktown". Rocktown is a derisive term used to this very day by people from all the surrounding towns and villages to designate Tamaroa.

Kindly colored folks living in the village of Du Quoin took the frightened, stricken family in and gave them food and shelter. They had fled the entire ten miles south on foot to escape the hell into which they had so innocently and unwisely moved. The late Watt Parks, the "Negroes' friend of DuQuoin", and Dr. Gillis, a prominent Du Quoin physician, supplied the poor creatures with warm clothing and other necessities. They also found a house for them to live in.

In the late 1920's of my own boyhood, I can recall tales of how negroes at that time who happened to be passing through Tamaroa were "rocked out of town". This, of course, was in keeping with the miserable little village's vicious and Mississippian type of behavior, which was unquestionably at its worst one Saturday winter evening in the year of 1869.

Peter Lee had already buried his third wife, Louisa Ayers, and had been married to his fourth wife, Mary Long, for four years. He was teaching the local school and was well liked for his dignified, quiet and effective way of teaching. He was completing the school term begun by Providence White, a maternal great-grandfather of the writer. White, a scholarly Easterner, asked to be relieved of his teaching duties because of his pressing coal mine interests. (He was operating the White "Red Onion" coal mine). So once again Peter Lee became a school teacher. In spite of his strong Southern sympathies and ties, Peter Lee believed in fair and just treatment for the black man. His father, Isaac Lee, had been noted for (in those times) the kindly consideration he had held for his slaves, and they reputedly showed him great affection in return.

In all probability, Peter Lee's Civil War activities and the way he helped administer justice during that awful lawless period enhanced the respect which the citizens had for him. The fact that he was never seen without either his father's boot pistol or his own much newer 32 six shooter "just in case he needed an equalizer" certainly did not detract from the special consideration regularly accorded to "Schoolmaster Peter" in those abominable post Civil War days.

On the night of the tragedy, Peter Lee was not in the village. He had gone out to the old homestead to spend the night with his father, mother, and three sisters, Sarelda, Jane, and Polly. His mother, Sarah Rachel, was ill. According to Aunt Sarah, Peter Lee said that if he'd been in town no colored man would have been hanged "just for the hell of it", as one of the participants later bragged. Peter said he'd have stopped it if he'd had to shoot "every hypocritical Baptist in the outfit".

The negro was a young man not over 18 or 19 years old. He was walking north up the railroad tracks from the direction of Du Quoin. Evidently he was headed for Centralia, as negroes lived there, too. Who he was or where he was going was never known, at least locally. He was a foolish young man to walk up that railroad track after early nightfall past the dimly lighted depot of Tamaroa. This depot was operated by the Illinois Central Railroad. It was a favorite hangout for local knaves or goons of that time. These "patriotic" citizens might go to church on Sunday, but they spent their evenings "down town" looking for some country boy to beat up or some other interesting diversion such as catching, pouring oil on a dog, and then setting fire to the poor creature.

Incidentally, country boys soon learned to gang up among themselves, and after some vicious skull cracking fights in which the town boys were overwhelmingly thrashed, country fellows, even when alone, were seldom annoyed, for the village goons did not relish the inevitable retaliation that would come, swift and sure!

The young negro, Aunt Sarah related to me, had gotten past the depot when two local men spotted him and challenged his audacity to walk through this "white man's town". Them was the time for that young man to have "shook the dust from his feet". He should have "run like hell" for dear life, his life! But instead, the young fellow stopped and in a somewhat confused and hesitant manner, apparently tried to make some answer to his accusers.

By this time several other depot loafers has alerted themselves and the unlucky negro was quickly surrounded and seized. Then the white citizens began a discussion as to what they should do to teach "the damned nigger allesson". Soon someone suggested that they ought to fix him so that the white girls of the village would be "safe" from at least one nigger. But no one seemed to have a knife. As fate chanced, it was then that a buggy and team was seen approaching from the north down the roadway next to the railroad. The driver was none other than John Sanders (not his real name, as the real scoundrel still has living descendants in the village, both legal and illegal). Sanders was a deacon in a local church and was a known "nigger hater".

Upon learning of the situation, John Sanders not only said that he had his hog castrating knife but that he would use it if they would hold the victim for him. Obliging hands soon stripped the terror stricken negro of his clothing, and while they held him spread-eagled and helpless, Deacon John quickly performed his merciless and cruel job.

What led to the next step can only be surmised. Possibly it was the sadistic brutality aroused in the villagers at the sight of the victim's blood streaming from their butchery. Could it have been some wild undetermined terror resulting from their wicked deed? Or was it a more primeval and savage urge? At any rate, the bloody, half-dead victim was tied behind the Deacon's buggy and was dragged two blocks west to the school yard. There his battered body was hanged to the low south limb of the giant elm tree that stood in the southeast corner of Peter Lee's school yard.

It was from this limb that the good citizens of the village of Tamaroa awoke that Sunday morning to see the battered, bruised, and mutilated body of a young negro grotesquely swinging and truning in the wind. Fear that the sight might be offensive to the ladies of the village as they drove to the church that morning led a prominent Presbyterian businessman (the body was hanging in plain sight and about a hundred feet from his church) to take immediate action. He hurriedly roused out the village handyman, gave him fifty cents, and told him to get rid of the body as fast as possible. So the handy man hitched up, drove out west of town to the White Walnut creek. Here he dumped the body on a large brush pile, piled on more limbs and set it on fire.

Thus an innocent young colored man's life was sacrificed to satisfy the cruel and savage lusts of some depraved and vicious villagers who were to laugh and brag about it the next day. No law officials were notified. Had they been, probably nothing would have been done. So nothing was done! The bonfire took care of things. It would seem that the fire erased the cruel picture for most of the townspeople. For after all, it was "just a nigger".

Of course there were a few who could sense the unbelievable senselessness of the thing. When great-grandfather Peter Lee heard how Deacon John Sanders had gone to church the next Sunday morning after his vile deed and had prayed his long pharasaical prayer asking the Lord to send his grace on "all us Baptists", he reputedly swore. And Peter Lee had to be truly angry to swear.

"That damned ignorant hypocrite," swore Peter Lee. "I don't believe he's got a conscience. If he had he'd die a thousand deaths for his part in that thing!"

"Do you know," said Aunt Satah as she related the gruesome event to me, "that man's wicked deed almost kept me from remaining a Baptist."

"Hanging that man has brought a curse on our town," declared old Granny Hall, whom most people claimed was a witch. "It will never grow

into a big community. Instead it will wither and die while nearby towns will grow and prosper." It would appear that the truth of Granny Hall's prophecy is self-evident today. Surely the curse had been acheived!

GYPSY BONEYARD

by

Raymond E. Lee

Colorful people in colorful covered wagons drawn by skinny, bony-ribbed horses appeared at regular intervals during each season at the gypsy camp ground on Reece's creek near the old country school for many years during my early boyhood. Almost invariably these nomads would be leading alonga lean, sorry-looking lot of old horses which they would eventually kill and skin for the hides. Where these pathetic, scraggly-looking horses came from always intrigued a small boy like me. Were they stolen? Did the gypsies trade some farmer out of them for a few dollars or a few cents? And how much were the gypsies paid for their hides?

Fortunately, the horse-skinning usually took place in the colder weather, or the terrible smell from the carcasses would have driven the farmers out for miles around. Of course, buzzards, dogs, foxes, skunks, possums, and other varmits had a feast. By 1921, however, the gypsies began to come less often to add to the already large pile of whitened horse bones near their camp. No doubt the automobiles were beginning to attract these wanderers and to change their way of travel and livelihood.

I had been warned repeatedly by Mother since infancy that "Gypsies stole little children," and that I must "never go near them." I was also told that they were thieves who "stole for a living."

Nevertheless, the fact that I had seen them for so many times probably helped to allay my fears on this memorable occasion when I was about nine years old and, in spite of all previous admonitions, I found myself drawn as if by some magnet down to their camp one late spring evening.

The early dusk had fallen, and as I neared the forbidden spot the camp fire was burning brightly. Several gypsy horses had been hobbled and were grazing the fresh tender grass along the side of the road. There was an enticing smell of food cooking in a large black pot over the fire. Edging curiously forward toward the covered wagons and the fire I found myself just outside the curcle of allurement when a voice called to me: "Come here, little boy."

Evidently I hesitated, for someone said: "Don't be afraid, little boy. We won't hurt you."

I still well remember the strange dazed or enchanted feeling I underwent when a young teen-age gypsy girl with long black hair and a flashing smile came over to me, held out her hand to mine, and led me into the firelit circle of gypsies.

As one who was hypnotized— and I may well have been—I allowed myself to be served some food from the big smoking pot. While I was eating, several handsome, dark-skinned young men, and some really beautiful girls, dressed in flowing bright colored dresses and adorned with large earrings, bright beads, and golden bracelets, began dancing and swirling to the music of a violin and castinets which two older members of the camp started playing.

What I ate--dog meat, horse meat, chickens lifted from some farmer's hen roost---I'll never know. But it was delicious! And the uninhibited love making and romancing of the young folks just outside the circle of firelight was too natural a thing to shock even my young and innocent and naive self.

One thing I do remember distinctly. I did not tell my mother where I had been or what I had done. I merely remarked to her query about where I had been with a wisdom acquired through the ages by man in his struggle to survive the inquisitive sex. Deliberately lighting my candle and heading upstairs to bed, I said to Mother: "I've been setting some bank lines doen along the creek. Mebbe we'll be able to have some catfish for breakfast."

For some reason, the fish didn't bite well, as I wasn't able to provide Mother with a single fish come morning. Evidently the turtles or the crawfish took all the bait off the hooks!

By 1930 the gypsies no longer came to the old camp site by the large pile of bones on Reece's creek. They were instead driving rapidly about the country in large touring type automobiles. It was said that they wintered in Florida and summered in the cities and about on the highways.

The gypsy women now wore their long, brightly colored, flowing dresses made with openings about the waist and in the bottoms of the pockets into which enormous quantities of merchandise could be dropped when they paid some small town merchant a quick surprise visit. The stolen goods would pass on down into the bottom of the huge skirt for better concealment in case they met any resistance. Often times one gypsy woman would get the storekeeper's attention while others would scatter about the store and fill their dresses with groceries, drygoods, notions, et al. After such a raid they would roar off in a cloud of dust leaving their victim to mull over his losses. Merchants eventually learned to run to their doors and quickly bolt them when these mauraders arrived.

Nearly all of the older gypsy women became adept at picking pockets, hypnotism, and shrewd deceit as was evidenced by this particular happening in the fall of 1930.

I was teaching my first year of school in the little country school that had been founded by my maternal great grandfather Williams. The Williams school was only a stone's throw from the old gypsy campsite and boneyard. It was in late September. My sister, Daisy, came to the school house door one mid-afternoon and knocked.

"I don't want to frighten you or the children," she gasped. "But a car full of gypsies has just robbed Ezra Brown of all the money he had in his pockets out in his pea field, and they tried to rob Poppa, but Momma chased them off with brother Howard's luger. Don't let any of the children go home after school till their parents come for them. Aunt Rachel Hampleman is busy on the party line warning everyone."

It developed that Father was shocking whippoorwill peas in the field just east of the house when a large touring car drove up alongside the field and a brightly dressed gypsy woman climbed out, crawled over the fence and headed across the field toward Father.

Father was almost totally deaf, but he was very good at reading lips. He had about $150.00 buttoned and pinned in his shirt pocket with a safety pin. This pocket was also well covered by his bib overalls.

How that gypsy woman managed to locate his money, unpin his pocket, remove the money, replace the empty wallet, and re-pin the shirt pocket while causing Father, a robust, 6-foot, fearless man to repeat after her in a dazed sing-song fashion, "I want to have good luck. I want to have good luck," is a puzzling thing to me to this very day.

Meanwhile, Mother, who happened to be in the kitchen churning butter in the old crocker-paddle-churn, glanced up in time to see the gypsy woman headed across the field toward Father. Evidently Mother's native cunning was instantly aroused, but instead of reaching for one of the loaded shot guns which always hung on the wall, she seized instead a loaded World War I German Luger from a cupboard shelf. She had never fired this gun. But she took off for the field on a run with the Luger in her hand.

The gypsy woman's back was to Mother as she neared the pair, but Mother could hear Father mumbling his hypnotized chant and she saw the clenched bills in the gypsy woman's hands.

"Drop that money! Every red cent of it! And git!" yelled Mother.

Mother, in her righteous indignation and fury, somehow must have involuntarily pushed open the safety catch and squeezed the trigger of the truly dangerous weapon. The shot was aimless but had its effect on the old gypsy woman. She let out a loud squawk, dropped the money on the ground—which was later recovered in toto—and headed in considerable haste for her car.

Exultant in her victory and in her now thoroughly aroused mad frenzy, Mother continued chasing the quite terrified gypsy female across the field, yelling Elizabethan epithets and continuing to pull the trigger of the really deadly German automatic. When she reached the fence the gypsy woman literally sailed over the top wire and in so doing lost both her shoes, jumped into the car and roared away in the blinding dust. Mother, the victor of the pea field, was the possessor of a pair of very badly worn out shoes.

Needless to say, Father was emotionally upset for several days from the sudden eruption amidst his normally placid, peaceful, and trusting way of life. He vowed that no gypsy woman would ever again get within pitchfork distance of him. And none ever did.

As for Mother, she was several weeks in calming down. She carried a loaded firearm about the place with her wherever she went. She would awake at night with the first chance bark of one of the dogs, grab her gun, and rush to the door or window to see what they were barking at. For Mother was quite sure in her own mind that the gypsies would eventually return for revenge.

During the first week of her constant vigil she actually chased a stranger out of the yard and down the road for some distance because he seemed a little slow to her in explaining his mission or the reason for his call. We learned later from the neighbors that the poor frightened man was a magazine salesman taking subscriptions for Prarie Farmer. Mother's ancestors were of that proud, dauntless, daring, and dashing blood who might well have borne this motto on their shields: "Don't tread on me!"

THOSE GOLDEN YEARS

by

Raymond E. Lee

Season followed season swiftly in those golden, happy, farm-life days of the late 1900's and early 1920's. I suppose our leanest times were in the late summer. By then all the salt pork was gone and the last of the hickory smoked hams had been taken down from the smokehouse rafters and eaten. The cows had gone dry, the drouth of summer had dried up the garden, and the chickens had quit laying and were now moulting. The hundred pound sacks of soft-wheat flour, for which we had exchanged a load of wheat the year before at the Tarmers Milling Company were gone. In fact, Mother has to sift the bugs out of the last nearly empty sack before she could make biscuits.

But Mother was enterprising. If food rations got too short, she would snatch up a few old hens and a rooster or two, hitch up old Trailer to the buggy and jog into the village where she would sell her poultry at Corr's Store or at the Tamaroa Store Company. Both stores paid 2¢ more per pound in trade money than in cash, so she would bring back a small sack of corn meal, a ten pound sack of navy beans, a little sugar, and sometimes a pound of coffee. If there was anything extra from the "chicken money", she might buy a ten or fifteen cent chunk of long-horn cheese, a luxury item with us. So we managed.

We never ran out of lard drippings. Mother even made her own lye soap and seldom ever had to buy and P and G or Fels Naptha. Mother did, however, try to keep a bar of Grandpa's Pine Tar Soap by the wash pan for hands and face.

By September the hens would be laying again, and a cow or two would come fresh. The big steam thresher of John Lemmon would have threshed our stacked bundles of wheat, and we again would have more soft wheat flour. The Minkler and Jonathan apples were now beginning to be edible. The blue plums could be picked and canned for later use in pies and jelly. A place under a pile of Timothy hay was made, too, for the Roman Beauty apples, where they could be kept to ripen and mellow in the cold winter months ahead. We were soon hulling walnuts and picking up hickory nuts, and wild pecan nuts. The hogs were fattening on the mast (acorns) in our woods, which we had carefully fenced with two-foot high heavy hog wire.

At the Williams country school boys and girls went barefoot till really cold weather . . . sometimes until early November. The boys wore overalls and the girls wore gingham dresses. A thick nickel tablet and a couple of penny pencils were expected to last a month. Every pupil had his slate and a slate pencil for his problem solving. Spit rather than a damp rag normally removed the figures on the slate so that the next assignment could be worked; that is, if "teacher" didn't catch us. Used copies of the necessary texts could be bought from H. L. Farmer's book store and print shop for 25¢ to 50¢ each.

We took out lunches to school in tin half-gallon syrup pails. Several kids from one family might put the entire lunch for all in a tin half-gallon syrup or lard pail. No boy or girl would be caught dead with a fancy cardboard "store boughten" lunch box. Such a stuck-up fellow would have been most quickly ostracised and would have been duked in Reeces' Creek or possibly have has his trousers forcibly removed for trying to be "better than the rest". The boys and girls always thought of ingenious but effective ways to handle non-conformists.

Late fall and early winter was the time to plant wheat, gather corn, and cut up wood for the winter wood pile. Often we would cut a bee tree or two which I had spotted during summer squirrel hunting and had "marked". And we never failed to shut up a few hogs that had been running in the woods and fattening on acorns, roots, grubs, etc. To these we fed all the corn they could eat for two or three weeks so their meat would be firm and good. The first cold spell meant butchering and a feast of good fresh meat.

All during the winter months Father would be called by the different neighbors to bring his equipment and to butcher for them. As payment, he was always given some fresh meat. It might be that he would bring home the liver, a side of ribs, or a chunk of side pork. We reveled in these treats.

Our own major butchering took place in late winter. The sausage would be made, and cooked, and the cakes of sausage would then be put in gallon crock jars and bowls, and covered with melted lard to make it keep. The lard was rendered from the hog fat in large iron kettles, the head cheese and mince meat portions and scraps would be cooked up, and the remaining major part of the hog salted down in brine or hickory-smoked and cured. All this was done that we might have meat in the long months ahead.

The hot cracklings would be squeezed in the lard press to remove the last drop of lard. These cracklings were considered good to eat as tidbits. But we saved them mostly for Bruno and Rags, out dogs. Nor did we follow the customs of some of out "foreign" Polish neighbors of saving the fresh blood drawn from the animals for bolld sausage, blood soup, and blood puddings. We did, however, thoroughly clean and use the intestines for stuffing some of our pork sausage. These intestines we would attach to the spout of the lard press and fill with fresh sausage.

Supplements to out diet in the winter came from rabbits, quails, and an occasional 'possum which I would catch. Mother would roast the 'possum and serve it with baked sweet potatoes. It was a bit too greasy for my taste, but I generally ate some of it. Some years we successfully raised ducks, turkeys, and geese. Always we had guineas, and learned to prize the dark, game-like meat. Few were the years that Father did not order empty shipping coops from Armour and Company in the late fall and express a hundred or more young guineas via the Illinois Central to Chicago.

Driving into the village when snow covered the ground was an anticipated joy, for Father had a home-made sled for such trips. It was made of heavy 2" x 12" oak runners, across which strong oak braces had been attached. Oak 1" x 12" boards were then nailed lengthwise. To this sled we would attach a set of double trees, which did service on the plow, the cultivators, and other seasonal machinery. Pete and Mike, our powerful and supple mules, most often pulled the sled.

Mother would always make out the "bill", a list of things needed from town. The few precious eggs would be carefully placed in a bucket of sawdust to keep them from breaking or freezing, and put on the sled along with a few pounds of home-made butter, perhaps a dozen dressed rabbits, and a half-dozen packages of sassafras roots. All such "produce" Father would exchange for trade money with which purchases would be made.

Trade money was more common in our village of Tamaroa than was U. S. money. Each merchant issued his own "good in trade only" in all regular denominations from 1¢ to five dollars. Pieces of this odd-shapped, copper-colored money are even far more rare today than are silver dollars. This "trade money" made it possible for a farmer to bring home what he did not spend that day for needed purchases later on. A few merchants would reluctantly exchange cash for their own trade money, but at a heavy discount.

Gliding swiftly down the road as the mules "took the rein" and eagerly trotted along was a rare winter pleasure. There were blankets in which one could wrap up if he wanted to ride on the sled. But if one got too chilly, he could jump out and run along behind the sled to get his blood circulating again.

Sometimes the Tamaroa Store Company would have oranges. When they did, Father would buy a few to take home. They were a luxury to me who had been surfeited on mellow Roman Beauty apples for so many weeks. I would eat the fruit of these tropical delights and carefully chew up the thick skins, much relishing the tangy, biting, oily juice therein.

To us, sweetening substances included white sugar, but in our family we were all very fond of sorghum, honey, brown sugar, and corn syrups. White sugar was used mostly in canning. And we always canned blackberries, dewberries, plums, apples, pears, and, if possible, some peaches. We cared little for cherries. Mother could make good blackberry wine, too!

We invariably started thinking about spring in February. This was the time the colorful seed catalogues from H. W. Buchbee and Condon Brothers of Rockford, Illinois came. (And we inevitably sowed lettuce (Tomhannock variety) on Valentine's Day, come sleet, snow, hell, or water! On mild days we hauled manure by the heaped up wagon load from the barn and scattered it by hand with our four-tined pitchforks over the fields needing it most.

If the ground became dry enough and the weather warm enough, we usually tried to sow oats in the latter part of February. Sometimes I would miss school, hitch up the team and disk, and then harrow the corn stubble field over which father would broadcast the oats by hand just ahead of my harrowing. The fish would bite well in mild February weather, too. The boys of the neighborhood would watch for a warm spell to spend the night on Little Muddy.

Our seven months of school was nearly always out in late March, and by April I was behind Pete and Mike, our stout and mischievous team of mules, wrestling with the walking plow on every day that the ground was dry enough to work. One year a beautiful cock-pheasant came out of one of the hedge rows and followed along behind the plow and me almost every day that I was in the fields. By evening his crop would be so full of bugs and worms that it would almost drag the ground. He never seemed to show the slightest fear of me, and that probably proved his downfall, for I never saw him after that one year. He probably fulfilled his destiny by gracing some hunter's table.

Corn, the hard, white, "Democrat" variety, we planted every year. No one ever heard of hybrid corn. The viney whippoorwill peas we planted every year, too. Field pumpkin seed we mixed with the seed corn in our one-horse walking planter with which we planted corn in the stumpy fertile creek bottom land. Both corn and pumpkins produced well in this rich virgin land that held more moisture than our higher post oak flats.

Father also generally had a few acres of red top hay, and he invariably managed to have at least ten acres of timothy hay. This hay we harvested every summer for the horses and the cows. First it had to be mowed; then it would be raked into ricks or piles, as we called them. We would then come along with pitch forks and turn the ricks into little shocks, each resembling a small hay stack. After the hay had cured a few days, we would pile it on the hay frame wagon and haul it to the barn.

We had a track and pulleys in the barn loft and Old Bill, an old plug horse, was so well trained that he would pull the big fork full of hay into the barn on signal, stop when the trip rope was pulled, and turn around and go back for the next load. Old Bill required no driving, but would do this job alone, completely away from any human guidance other than our shouted signals from the opposite side of the barn. Such was his gently, kindly intelligence.

My birthday came on May 7th, and a birthday cake was an essential annual feature. Candles were never used but, instead, Mother would adorn the white cake icing with tiny sprigs of apple buds and blossoms, for the orchard was regularly in full bloom then. Friends about my age would be invited in to play games most of the afternoon. No one ever bought or was expected to bring a present. Honoring me by coming was all the present I ever dreamed of expecting.

If farming wasn't too heavy and a buggy horse could be spared from the field work, Mother would go into town to the Stockton Brothers Ice House and purchase a 10¢ chunk of ice. This ice would be wrapped in gunny sacks to keep it from melting on the three-mile trip home. There were always plenty of volunteers to turn the gallon ice cream freezer at my birthday parties. One year I remember that Mother added a small can of crushed pineapple to the ice cream mixture. Another year she cut up two or three bananas and placed them in the ice cream. Those were very special, never to be forgotten, red letter years! What a joy to be alive for such treats!

Fourth of July was another memorable time for a boy growing up in the 1920's. The legislative do-gooders, the anti-gun bugs, the interfering busy-bodies, and great society planners had not yet come along to mess every thing up. Chinese firecrackers, sparklers, and Roman candles were legal! No one in those days, of course, really had any idea of the wonderful days ahead when these sinful, dangerous things would be made illegal . . . when they would be replaced by such blessings as "hoods", motorcycle gangs, hippies, yippies, queers, freaks, and pornographic movies. Neither had the great cradle-to-the-grave "philosophers" been spawned upon us.

Not realizing that we might be maimed or killed by these terrible sparklers and noisy fireworkd . . . but no one ever was . . . every kid in the neighborhood would save his little hoard of pennies for the great bangup day. Ice cream we generally had, too. And if we bought a little extra ice, and even if the cows probably thought we were a little crazy, we'd drive them up from the fields and milk them again at noon so we would have another gallon of ice cream. If any ice was left after that, it was carefully placed in the wooden water bucket and we had wonderful ice water to drink.

What a rich life we led in those days when we lived in such wholesome ignorance of what was right and what was wrong! Little did we know that we were doing evil things for which our own children would be spied upon and fined, and arrested by "big brother who was watching", when speed traps would be set up to ensnare innocent travelers by officials who could better spend their time in prevention of serious crimes, and when streets, roadways, and homes would no longer be safe for the peaceful citizen.

Threshing time began in mid-to-late summer, and the big steam engine and the separator which made the monstrous stacks of straw would chug and puff majestically into our big horse-lot to where the wheat was stacked. It took a lot of water to keep the giant boiler filled with power, and in those dry months the wagon was really kept busy pumping water from old wells, ponds, and creek holes.

It took from ten to 20 men to man the threshing rig and do all of the related work. Farmers would swap work for miles around helping each other with teams and wagons and time in a truly neighborly way. The women folks would help each other out, too, for feeding the threshers was no small task. Each farmer's wife would put her best foot forward to feed them extra well. Tables overflowed at meal times with fried chicken, potatoes, dressing, gravy, dumplings, ham, bread, butter, cake, pies, and other solid man-foods. In no place was any complaint ever made about food except at a certain farm home. There strange-tasting fowl was served, and the threshermen later learned that they'd been served baked crow! How those men did curse and swear when it fully became known to them! The farmer soon left the neighborhood. For him, baked crow proved quite expensive.

Then there was that unforgetable threshing day at the Ike Simmons home. Noontime came and Ike's wife, Mayme, sent out word to the machine that "dinner" was ready. Short blasts from the mighty behemoth gave out the good news that food was ready for all the hungry men. The general rush of the men to the house and kitchen where the food was waiting was interrupted as one of the men stopped by the well in the yard and let down the chain rope and drew up a wooden bucket dripping with fresh, cold, delicious looking water. How those dry and dusty men did thirstily drink as the two gourd dippers were passed around! But of course I had to spoil things! Boy-like I stuck my head over the well curb and looked down into the well.

"Say," I yelled, "What is that thing floating in the water down there?"

Several looked. Gasps of horror followed. For there, floating on the surface of the water, was the bloated body of a large gray cat! It was the old family tom cat that had been missing for several days!

Some neighbors seemed to have more problems in our neighborhood than others as the seasons rolled along. There was Adam Bayjack. He was a city fellow from Chicago who with his wife and son, a boy about my age, had moved on to the old Ozzie Rice forty where he tried quite unsuccessfully to eke out a living for several bleak and hungry years.

I remember Father trying to tell him he should put lime and manure on his worn out soil to make it prosuce. Father even brought Adam over to our home one day and proudly showed him our beautiful ten acre patch of white sweet clover which we had pioneered in growing successfully in our part of the county. Father read widely and understood soil testing and enrichment.

But Adam just couldn't quite seem to get the knack of farming and his crops just wouldn't grow well at all.

I really liked to play with young Adam Jr., and we had lots of fun fishing and roaming the woods. Swimming, now called skinny dipping, together in Thompson's "hole", a deep spot along Reece's Creek, was almost a daily must with us. That is, it was until that day when Adam Jr. told me that "my girl" of the moment, one Faye Pierce, was "his girl" now. This led most naturally to a terrible fight in which neither of us ever did admit defeat, and we became bitter enemies "for life", at the buoyant age of ten . . .

Another quaint and different custom in which Adam Bayjack Sr. indulged was in regularly kicking and beating his wife. His curses and her screeches and screamings could be heard by several near-by neighbors almost every day.

Finally, John Crane, a rather elderly neighbor living near the Bayjack place, decided it was his Christian duty to go over and remonstrate with Adam. So, during a particularly loud and noisy time, old John went stalking over to Adam's house carrying his walking stich or cane just as he always did. John Crane was solemly determined to do his duty on this peace mission.

However, ole John had hardly begun his dessertation to the pair when the wife of Adam Sr. turned on him and screamed: "So! Vot you mean! Telling mine usband, vot he should done! You git out, you damned son of "britches!"

And with that Mrs. Bayjack seized poor Crane's cane from his hand and started pummeling him with it. Most certainly the battered old dogooder neighbor left the scene with considerably less dignity than when he arrived. As far as I know, John Crane never again interfered in anyone's personal affairs from that day on until he died a few years later. Doubtless he learned a lesson on that day which our own great nation still needs to learn . . . that there are times when it is best to mind our own business.

Meanwhile, Adam Bayjack Sr. kept chastizing his wife and she kept screaming and yelling and squalling until the day they finally gave up farming and went back to the city to live. I remember young Adam Jr. once told me that his father beat his mother to "keep her healthy." He told me this before "our fight."

A number of years later I heard from a not too reliable source that young Adam Jr. became a fairly important personage in the later period of prohibition gangland in the city.

Another neighbor whom I would like to mention was Gus Griffith. Gus lived across the west woods from us. He was to rear a family of exceptionally intelligent and talented children who were to "do well." One son was to become president of the local Farmers State Bank. Another was to be a prominent educator, and a daughter was to manage a large store for many years.

Gus Griffith was the only farmer around who had learned the secret of raising strawberries. People for miles around would drive down to Gus Griffith's house when strawberries were ripe. But I'll forever remember best of all Gus Griffith's feud with the government. He libed about a mile up a lane off the little muddy (dusty) winding road which the mail carrier traveled, Gus felt that the road past his house should ne made a public road and that the carrier should be forced to bring his mail down to his house.

However, Gus was never able to convince Uncle Sam of the justice of his desires. Consequently, Gus Griffith refused to place a mail box at the end of the land for his daily mail, but directed the local postmaster to hold his mail for him in town. So, instead of daily delivery, our good neighbor

would pick up his mail only once or twice a month or when he happened to go to town. It was years after Gus' death before the road past his old log home was graded and straightened, the gates and fences set back, and sound bridges placed over the streams.

Gus did not win his battle. But he at least maintained his human dignity and he stood up for what he felt was right. No doubt he felt a great personal satisfaction in refusing to accept his mail from a box on a rural route when the route did not go past his home. No doubt a closer scrutiny of this pioneer "protector" would show a surprisingly close affinity to the thinking of some of today's protestors!

I do not feel that this telling of the days of a more pastoral kind or way of life in America would be complete unless I spoke of some of the adventures of one of our best and finest old neighbors, Ike Simmons, and especially about his new Model T. Ike was a tall, gentlemanly farmer with a white goatee and a mannerly mien comparable at times to that of a true Southers gentleman of the old school. He was a stockholder and a member of the Board of Directors of the local Farmers State Bank . . . capital stock of $25,000. In keeping with the new machine age and also, no doubt, because Sr. R. Haines, the friendly banker of the First National Bank, had a car, Ike decided that he must buy a new Model T Ford. . .

Ike planned to play it safe in learning to drive the darned contraption. He had his boys, Dwight and Lyle, drive the new car out into the pasture where they carefully instructed him in the complicated intricacies of the horseless vehicle. How to start, guide, shift gears, and stop the car was all minutely explained, and Ike got behind the steering wheel and started off. All went well with starting and getting underway, but stopping was another matter.

As the car gathered momentum under the fully extended gas and spark levers and headed toward the hedge fence at a brisk pace of perhaps ten miles per hour, Ike became confused and started yelling, "WO-AH! WO-AH! WO-AH!" But the car kept right on going.

A badly dented and banged up new black Ford touring car was the result, and Ike never again tried to drive after his first exciting and disastrous adventure. From that day until his death, Ike Simmons refused to ever try to drive. Either Dwight or Lyle, his sons, acted as charuffeurs.

Included in Ike's progressive ideas was that of improving the breed of scrub cattle in the neighborhood. So for years he kept a large, handsome, but vicious and evil-minded registered Jersey bull for that purpose.

In order to protect himself, Ike always carried a pitchfork when he went to the pasture to drive in the cattle or when he walked about the cow lot or the cow barn. But one evening Ike got a bit careless in the barn lot and laid down his pitchfork to care for some little task.

The bull saw his chance and charged. Quickly the Jersey bull pinned Ike down and started goring him to death with evident leisurely and vicious pleasure. The bull was evening up the score ofnumerous jabbings from that sharp three-tined pitchfork that had nipped him so many times. As the victim's cries of agony and terror grew weaker, a son came out of the house, saw what was happening, rushed back in, seized a .32 rifle, and shot the bull.

Except for a weake pulse, there was practically no sign of life in poor Ike. Calls on the party line soon brought Elza Winthrope, a neighbor, with a bottle of stout home-made elderberry wine, which was poured down poor Ike's throat a few sips at a time. The combined ringing of all the excited neighbors on the telephone line finally aroused the attention of Josie Crawford,

the telephone operator, and she got word to Dr. J. T. Marlow, who was soon galloping frantically out from the Tamaroa village with his drugs and competent know-how.

Though he was bedfast for several weeks, Ike survived the harrowing ordeal to die a number of years later, the victim of what was apparently some form of asthma.

I will always remember Ike Simmons as a strong-willed person who was not afraid to assert himself. Truly an individualist of the first order, he was a person not easily forgotten. He was very proud, and at times he seemed to some of his neighbors to be a bit aloof from them. Father, who always neighbored as closely as anyone with Ike, one time decided it would be fun to give Ike an experience that would bring him into a more informal relationship with his neighbors than was his want. Here's what came about:

Ike and his family had been to Florida for the improvement of his asthma . . . and he had returned for the Spring planting. It was about the middle of March, as I recall. Father called on several of the closer neighbors and told them that what Ike needed was a good housewarming, or charivari just like was done to all newly-weds in those days . . .

Accordingly, on the appointed night, a gathering of perhaps twenty-five neighbors met in a nearby grove with cowbells, tin pans, shotguns (no license required!) and other handy noise-making things. All waited until the Simmons family put out all their kerosene lights and went to bed. The party then quickly surrounded the house and, at a given signal, all hell and pandemonium seemed to break loose. The stillness was shattered by enough noise to awaken the dead in a nearby cemetary. Possibly it did arouse them, and their spirits came flitting over the enjoy the episode!

After what seemed a long time, the lamps were lit and Ike and his family came out on their front porch. And the way Ike laughed and showed his pleasure at his neighbors' big surprise for him and their neighborliness did much to dispel the belief of a few that Ike was a bit too aloof or unfriendly. Or perhaps it was the liquid refreshment of the big baskets of food that the neighbors thoughtfully provided that added to the general atmosphere of congeniality. Certainly everyone had fun ! But none enjoyed the evening more than our wonderful old neighbor, Ike Simmons. His happy laugh could easily have been heard for a mile on the still night air.